

LEGENDARY 1950s EC COMICS!

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CANADA

TALES FROM THE CRYPT

®

FEATURING



THE CRYPT-KEEPER



THE OLD WITCH



THE VAULT-KEEPER



THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEN, HEN! SO YOU'RE BACK FOR MORE GORE, EN-FEENOS? WELL, THIS IS THE SPOT FOR IT! WELCOME TO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! THIS IS YOUR HOST IN HOWLS, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, READY TO START THE GORE ROLLING IN BY REEKING BARS WITH ANOTHER SPINE-TINGLING TALE FROM MY GREEP-COLLECTION. TIGHTEN YOUR BELTS SO YOU WON'T BE SCARED OUT OF YOUR PARTS, AND I'LL BEGIN THE BLOOD-GORGOLER. I TELL...

UNDERTAKING PALOR



THERE IS A HORROR CURIOUSITY IN CHILDREN, A STRANGE FASCINATION WITH DEATH. IT HURRIES THEM TO THE SCREENS OF ACCIDENTS, SUCKS THEM INTO MOVIE THEATERS TO WATCH IT UNFOLD ON SILVER SCREENS, PROMPTS THEM TO MARK-BELIEVE ABOUT IT... AND DRAWS THEM TO WINDOWS IN UNDERTAKING PARLORS.



DEATH IS THE UNKNOWN IN THE LIFE EQUATION. IT IS THE ULTIMATE FINAL RESULT OF EVERY LIVING EXAMPLE. IT IS THE UNANSWERABLE TO YOUNG MINDS SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS.



SO IT WAS ONLY NATURAL FOR CHERRY AND PETE AND BILLY AND PERCIVAL TO WANT TO SEE MORE OF THIS UNFATHOMABLE PROBLEM... TO WANT TO LEARN WHAT WENT ON BEHIND MR. ESPROCK'S CLOSED MORTUARY DOORS.



INSIDE THE MORTUARY, OBVIOUS TO THE WIDE-PRYING EYES THAT FOLLOWED HIS EVERY MOVE, AVERILL ESPROCK LABORED SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, AS IF HE ENJOYED HIS WORK.



AND AS HE WORKED, AVERILL HUMMED SOFTLY, FILLING THE MORTUARY WITH HIS MATED GREEN BUSS.



THE PUMP BEGAN TO CHUG, GURGLES THE SCARLET LIQUID OUT OF THE DEAD BODY THROUGH THE PULSATING TUBE AND SENDS IT INTO THE PORCELAIN SINK.



AFTER A WHILE THE GURGLES STOPPED AND THE PUMP RAN QUIETLY.



MR. ESPROCK RINERS THE HOSE THAT RAN OFF INTO THE RED-STAINED PORCELAIN SINK AND PUSHED IT INTO THE NECK OF THE JUB WITH THE COLORLESS LIQUID...

I'LL BET A NICKEL THAT'S EMERALMIN FLUID!

I'LL BET YOU'RE RIGHT!

I'M GONNA HOME, MY PAW'S BEEN SICK AND

STICK AROUND, PERCY!



AVERRILL PRESSED A SWITCH. THE PUMP REVERSED ITSELF. THE GURGLING BEGAN AGAIN. THE COLORLESS LIQUID IN THE JUG BEGAN TO SLOWLY DISAPPEAR, FORCED INTO MR. GROWER'S EMPTY ARTERIES...

SEE? WHAT I TELL YOU!

GRAY, SMART, BUT? SO YOU KNOW EVERYTHING?

REALLY, FELLERS, POP'S BEEN IN BED, AN...

STICK AROUND, PERCY!



THE LAST DROP OF THE EMERALMIN FLUID GARGLED OUT OF THE JUG AS THE LAST DROP OF A SOGA IS SUCKED FROM A FOUNTAIN GLASS THROUGH A FRAYED STRAW. MR. ESPROCK SAUT OFF THE MOTOR...

IS HE DONE?

WAIT AN SEC?

LISTEN. SOMEONE JUST CAME IN THE FRONT DOOR!



SOMEWHERE IN THE MORTUARY, A BELL TINKLED. MR. ESPROCK STIFFENED. A FIGURE DREPT ASIDE THE CURTAINS AND CAME INTO THE BACK ROOM.

NOBODY, AVERILL! I CAME FOR MY GUT!

ANYBODY SEE YOU COME IN, MORT?



THE KIDS, PEERING THROUGH THEIR PEEP-HOLE, WHISPERED EXCITEDLY...

IT'S MR. GROWER, THE DROGIST! WHAT'S HE WANT?

LISTEN! MAYBE WE'LL FIND OUT!



NOPE... NOBODY SAW ME. HOW MUCH DO WE MAKE THIS TIME?

FIFTY BUCKS EACH! THAT'S THE BEST I COULD DO! THE BROOKS' FAMILY DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY. I FINALLY TALKED 'EM INTO THE TWO HUNDRED DOLLAR FUNERAL. I CLEAR A HUNDRED ON THAT ONE!



FIFTY BUCKS? FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD, IT DON'T PAY TO TAKE SUCH CHANCES FOR THAT LITTLE DOWNS.

WELL, NEXT TIME YOU POISON A PRESCRIPTION, MAKE SURE IT'S FOR SOMEBODY WHO CAN AFFORD A BIG FUNERAL...







AFTER CHERRY LEFT, PETE TOLD HIS PLAN TO BILLY, THEN THEY WENT AROUND TO THE FRONT OF MR. ESPROCK'S MORTUARY AND WAITED. THEY WAITED UNTIL MR. ESPROCK CAME OUT.



MR. MR. ESPROCK
SAY, WHAT'S
WRONG?

WHY? YOU DON'T
LOOK SO
GOOD, MR.
ESPROCK?

YOU LOOK
PALE, MR.
ESPROCK.
YOU LOOK
SICK?



YOU
GIMMIE
DOWN WITH
SOMETHIN'?

I DON'T
KNOW!
ESPROCK
ME, BOYS.

MR. ESPROCK WENT BACK INTO THE MORTUARY. THE KIDS DARTED AROUND TO THE BACK WINDOW IN TIME TO HEAR...



HELLO, MORT? AKEBELL? DAN
OR... MAYBE YOU'D BETTER SEND
THAT TONIC OVER AFTER ALL!
I DO FEEL KINDA... KINDA
RUN DOWN!

OUTSIDE MR. GRUBBY'S STORE, CHERRY WAITED PATIENTLY. FINALLY, MR. GRUBBY CAME OUT...



HOW'D YOU LIKE TO MAKE
A ANGEL, CHERRY? BELIEVE
THIS PACKAGE OVER T' ME,
ESPROCK AT THE UNDER-
TAKING PARLOR...

SURE THING,
MR. GRUBBY!

CHERRY TOOK THE PACKAGE AND RUSHED STRAIGHT TO THE CLUB HOUSE WITH IT. PETE AND BILLY WERE WAITING...



HERE IT IS!

OH, POOR
IT OUT...

HERE'S THE
BAT-POISON...

MR. ESPROCK OPENED THE DOOR TO HIS MORTUARY TO SEE CHERRY STANDING BEFORE HIM, HOLDING A STRAY CAT IN ONE HAND AND THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC' IN THE OTHER.



MR. GRUBBY ASKED
ME TO DELIVER
THIS, MR. ESPROCK!

OH, THANK
YOU, CHERRY!

CHERRY HELD OUT THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC', LETTING IT SLIP FROM HIS FINGERS...



HERE Y'ARE,
DOOP!

LOOK OUT,
YOU--GLIMBY!

THE BOTTLE SMASHED INTO A THOUSAND GLITTERING FRAGMENTS AND THE 'TONIC' POOLED OUT OVER THE MORTUARY FLOOR. CHERRY RELEASED THE STRAY CAT...



BILLY? I'M GONNA
MR. ESPROCK. I.I
HERE, KITTY?

GET THAT
CAT OUT
OF HERE!



THE KNIFE IN MR. ESPROCK'S HAND GLINTED IN THE MOONLIGHT...

AVERRILL! DON'T YOU TRY TO KILL ME, GRUBBY WELL NOW... I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!



MR. ESPROCK SPUN AROUND, THE KNIFE CLUTCHED TIGHTLY IN HIS HAND.

WHO'S THERE!? I WON'T LET'S RUN FOR IT!



SUDDENLY, MR. ESPROCK PLUNGED FORWARD, SPLATTERING HIS HEAD UPON THE SHARP CORNER OF A NEWLY CUT TOMBSTONE...



MR. ESPROCK BROUGHT THE KNIFE DOWN INTO MR. GRUBBY'S CHEST. MR. GRUBBY'S SCREAM ECHOED THROUGH THE SILENT CEMETERY.



THE KIDS BEGAN TO RUN. MR. ESPROCK SCREAMED AFTER THEM.

COME BACK HERE, YOUNG CHERRY! I CAN'T GRAB ANY... FASTER!



AND WHEN THE BOYS CAUTIOUSLY RETURNED TO WHERE HE LAY

HE'S DEAD! LOOK! LOOK AT THE NAME PLATE ON THE HEADSTONE! IT'S PETER VANDERBILT SR.



SUDDENLY THE NIGHT WAS VERY STILL, SAVE FOR AVERILL, ESPROCK'S HEART BEATING AS HE STOOD OVER MR. GRUBBY'S PROTESTICALLY SPRAWLED BODY. AND THEN...



THEY RAN WILDLY OVER THE GRAVEYARDS... THE THREE TERRIFIED BOYS, WITH BUNGEED MR. ESPROCK CLOSE BEHIND THEM, BRASHING THE BLOODY HAIR...

OUR CHILDREN! I CAN'T I'LL KILL YOU! I SWEAR IF I'LL...



WELL, NOW THERE'S A STRIKING WIND-UP TO A TERRIFYING TALE. EN, CREEPS? NOW, THE NIGHT-KEEPER WAITS WITH HIS TALE OF GHOSTS AND GARGOYLES, SO I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO HIM. I'LL DO YOU LATER, TALKING 'BOUT DRIVING, AS THE FRENCH BEE-HOPPER SAID WHEN HE SAW THE BULLDOZZER. 'MAN, DID THAT CRAZY BARBER CHASE!'



THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH. AND NOW, VILFURES, IF YOU WILL MENTURE INTO THE VAULT OF HORROR, YOUR HOST, THE VAULT-KEEPER WILL ENTERTAIN YOU. FOR THIS, MY FINAL FICTIONAL PLUNG, I HAVE CHOSEN A BRAVE TALE, YEP? IT'S TOLD BY A BRAVE! SO, CUGGLE UP TO THAT COMSE OVER THERE AND I'LL BEGIN THE DRAMA OF DREAD AND DEATH CALLED...

THE CRAVING GRAVE!



THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE CHARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONE MONUMENTS THAT THE OTHERS PROUDLY HOLD UPWARD TOWARD THE NIGHT SKY. BUT UPON MY BREAST THERE IS NO COLD STONE FOR THE WIND TO SING OVER. I LIE SILENT WITH AN EMPTINESS WITHIN ME... A TEARFUL. THE OTHERS SIGH CONTENTEDLY, SHIFTING AND CRACKING, EMBRACING THEIR CHARGES... THEIR RIGID CHILDREN... BUT I AM BARREN... FRUITLESS. BENEATH MY WOUNDED OUTER SKIN-CRUST, NO FIRM CHARGE LIES, NESTLING. I AM LONELY. I AM WAITING...



I AM AN UNOCCUPIED GRAVE, CRYING WITH THE CRYING WIND... WAITING FOR MY LONELINESS TO END...
WAITING FOR A BODY!

I HAVE WAITED LIKE THIS THROUGH THE CENTURIES, WATCHING THE OTHERS AROUND ME, EACH IN THEIR TURN, OPEN WIDE THEIR YAWNING MOUTHS AND TALK IN THEIR WARDS, CRAGLING THEM HAPPILY WITHIN THEIR EARTH-WOMES.



LOWER THE COFFIN...

SORL, SORL...

ON NIGHTS LIKE THIS ONE... WHEN THE SKY IS OVERCAST WITH LOW HANGING RAIN-CLOUDS, WHEN I CAN SEE NO STARS... I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN TO THE HAPPY CHATTERING OF THE BAYERS AROUND ME BARGAINING, PROTECTING, CARING FOR THEIR BROOD. I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN AND YEARN. I YEARN FOR THE DAY WHEN I, TOO, WILL REACH FORTH AND DRAW IN MY DEATH-RETUS AND HOLD IT FAST, DUCKLING IT WITH MY GAMPNESS.



HERE IT IS, WILLIE.

LET'S GET TO IT, AL. NOT MUCH TIME LEFT TILL MORNING!

BUT, WAIT! WHAT IS THAT I HEAR?? VOICES IN THE WIND... VOICES OVER MY? AND WHAT IS THAT I FEEL?? COLD STEEL PENTING MY CHEST... CRACKING OPEN MY EARTH-SKIN...



WHY DON'T PEOPLE DIE IN THE DOWNCASTING... WHEN THE GROUND IS ROFT??

I'LL TELL MY COMRESS-MAN THEY'LL PASS A LAW!

I HAVE LAID FALLOW THROUGH THE FREEZED AND THE THAW, HEAVING THEM BARSSING THEIR FOSTER-CHILDREN, AND LONGING FOR MY OWN. ON SUNDAYS, I HAVE LISTENED TO THE MOURNERS AND REMEMBRERS COME AND CRY UPON THE OTHERS AND PLACE FLOWERS UPON THEIR BEDSOMS.



SORL, SORL...

HE WAS A GOOD MAN...

AND ALWAYS, WHEN THE WIND COMES UP ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES, IT CARRIES THEIR LAUGHTER TO ME. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEIR PURPOSE. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY ARE NO LONGER EMPTY AND BARREN AND CHILDLESS. THEY LAUGH AT ME...



USE! HARD AS A ROCK!

HERE, USE THE PICK...

THERE IS A THROBBLING DOWN DEEP WITHIN ME... A SURGE OF EXCITEMENT AND ANTICIPATION. THE WIND DIES... AND THE LAUGHTER DIES...



HOW OLD WAS SHE?

SIXTY-THREE...

ALL THESE YEARS OF WAITING! ALL THESE YEARS OF LONGING AND YEARNING AND CRYING... THEY'RE ALMOST OVER. THOSE MEN UPON MY CHEST... THEY'RE BRABE DIS-RENS...



AND NOW IT IS MORNING. I LIE WITH MY INSIDES TORN FROM ME AND HEAPED UP AT MY SIDE. I LIE OPEN, FEELING THE SUNLIGHT. THE COLD AIR. I HEAR THE CRUNCHING STEPS THAT I HAVE HEARD SO OFTEN. HEAR THE GRUNTS OF THE FALLBEARERS THAT HAVE NEVER UNTIL THIS DAY DELIVERED UNTO ME. AND I SMILE.



THE COFFIN IS LOWERED. I REACH UPWARD FOR IT, ACCEPTING IT, FEELING OF ITS SMOOTHNESS, AND SENSING OF ITS CONTENTS... MY DEATH-WARD. MY CORPSE—CHARGE... MY OWN.



THE GRAVE DIGGERS TRUDGE OFF. I AM FULFILLED. THE EMPTEENESS WITHIN ME IS GONE...THE YEARNING VANISHED. THE BODY LIES GUARDED INSIDE ME. I WHISPER TO IT. SOOTHING IT. COMFORTING IT IN ITS FINAL REST.



THE DAYS AND WEEKS PASS, BUT THE BODY WITHIN MY FOLD DOES NOT LIE AT REST. THE BODY WITHIN ME IS NOT AT PEACE. THERE IS A STIRLING INSIDE THE COFFIN NESTLING IN MY BOSOM. A FLUTTERING... A SCRATCHING.



I LISTEN WITH A DRUNKEN JOY TO THE CEREMONY, FEELING THE MOURNERS' FEET UPON MY BREAST. THERE ARE NOT MANY MOURNERS...A MOTHER, HIS WIFE, AND A LAYED-FRIEND. BUT I DO NOT CARE. IT IS NOT THE DRUMMINGONES I AM INTERESTED IN! IT IS THE ONE FOR WHOM THEY GRIEVE.



THE MOURNERS LEAVE. THE GRAVE DIGGERS STEP FORWARD WITH THEIR SHOVELS. I EMBRACE THE COFFIN MORE AND MORE AS THEY RETURN. MY SOIL-REMAKERS TO ME. THEY STAND, FINALLY, UPON MY REPAIRED BODY, TAMING DOWN MY OUTER SKIN, STITCHING UP THE WOUND.



THE BODY TELLS ME HER STORY. HER NAME IS CYNTHIA MEADOWS. SHE WAS, LIKE ME, LOVELY ALL HER LIFE. SHE'D REMAINED UNMARRIED, BARREN, FRUITLESS, YEARNING FOR THE THING HER MARRIED SISTER HAD.



THE BOY STIRRING WITHIN ME TELLS ME OF THE LONELY YEARS... THE LONGING SHE'D FELT FOR A CHILD OF HER OWN, AND I UNDERSTAND, HADN'T I FELT THE SAME AS SHE?

MAMA SAYS YOU'RE AN OLD MAID, AUNT CYNTHIA. WHAT'S AN OLD MAID?

IT'S... IT'S A WOMAN WHO NEVER MARRIES, ROLAND. A WOMAN WHO HAD NO CHILDREN OF HER OWN.



AND THE EMPTY YEARS HAD CRAWLED BY. AS THEY CRAWLED FOR ME, SHE MADE WISE INVESTMENTS OF THE INHERITANCE SHE'D SHARED WITH HER SISTER, AND SHE'D GROWN WEALTHY, WHILE HER SISTER...

GEORGE'S BUSINESS FAILED, CYNTHIA. HE'S LOST EVERY CENT WE HAD!

I'M SORRY, MYRA. I'LL TRY TO HELP YOU!



SHE'D FELT THE LAUGHTER... THE SCORN AROUND HER AS I'D FELT SCORN. SHE'D WATCHED THE OTHER WOMEN SHE KNEW MARRY AND HAVE CHILDREN, AND SHE'D GROWN AS I'D GROWN...

SOR—SOR—

HURRY, EDITH! DINNER'S READY!

YES, MOTHER!



AND SHE'S WAITED THROUGH THE YEARS... AS I'D WAITED... FINALLY...

WHAT IS IT, GEORGE?

IT'S MYRA, CYNTHIA. SHE'S DESPERATELY ILL. PLEASE... COME, QUICKLY!



MYRA'D FALLEN ILL SUDDENLY, SHE'D DIED WITHIN THE WEEK...

AND SO, THE LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED FOR CYNTHIA AS MY LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED. SHE'D TAKEN ROLAND TO HER BOSOM AS I'D TAKEN HER...

ROLAND'S ARRIVAL IN CYNTHIA'S HOUSE HAD MEANT THE END OF THE LAUGHTER AROUND HER, THE END OF SCORN... JUST AS HER ARRIVAL HAD MEANT THE END OF SCORN FOR ME...

WHAT, SOB. WHAT ABOUT ROLAND, CYNTHIA? WHAT WILL I DO WITH HIM?

I'LL... I'LL LOOK AFTER HIM, GEORGE... IF YOU WANT ME TO.



BUT I WANT MY MOMMY!

YOU MOTHER HAS GONE AWAY, ROLAND. SHE'S GONE AWAY FOR A LONG TIME.



ROLAND? DINNER'S READY, MOTHER.

YES, AUNT CYNTHIA!



CYNTHIA, TOO, HAD BEEN FULFILLED. SHE'D GUARDED ROLAND, COMFORTED HIM, AND HE'D GROWN INTO MANHOOD. BUT THERE WAS A STINGING WITHIN HIM...JUST AS NOW, CYNTHIA STIRS...



I'M LEAVING AWAY, AUNT CYNTHIA. I CAN'T STAY HERE ANY LONGER.

ROLAND? DON'T LEAVE ME! PLEASE.

THE SCORCHING, CLAWING BOOY WITHIN HE TELLS HOW ROLAND HAD LEFT HER...DESPITE HER PLEADING...LEFT HER TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN AROUND HER...ONCE MORE...



SOB...SOB...

AND THEN SHE'D DISCOVERED WHY ROLAND HAD LEFT SO SUDDENLY...



THE MONEY! I HAD THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS IN THIS DRAWER...IT'S GONE!

POOR CYNTHIA. HOW SORRY I FEEL FOR HER...TO YEARN FOR SOMETHING...TO YEARN FOR IT FOR SO LONG...TO FINALLY GET IT...AND THEN TO LOSE IT ONCE MORE. SHE TELLS ME OF HOW BROKEN-HEARTED SHE WAS.



ROLAND. SOB... ROLAND.

SHE TELLS ME HOW SHE'D TRIED TO FORGET HIM. SHE TELLS ME HOW HER INVESTMENTS HAD CONTINUED TO MAKE HER WEALTHIER AND WEALTHIER...AND THEN...SIX YEARS LATER...



YES, WHO IS IT? WHO...ROLAND? YOU'VE COME BACK!

YES, AUNT CYNTHIA. AND I'VE BROUGHT SOMEONE.

CYNTHIA'D BEEN SO GLAD TO SEE ROLAND SHE'D COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN THE CRIME HE'D COMMITTED WHEN HE'D LEFT...



THIS IS MY WIFE ERICA, AUNT CYNTHIA. ERICA, THIS IS MY AUNT CYNTHIA...

ROLAND'S TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT YOU, AUNT CYNTHIA!

THEY'D COME TO LIVE WITH HER. ROLAND'D BOGGED CYNTHIA'S FORGIVENESS.



I WAS FOOLISH AND FOOLISH, AUNT CYNTHIA. IT WAS WRONG OF ME TO TAKE THE MONEY! I'M SORRY!

THERE, THERE, ROLAND. IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO!

SO ONCE MORE THE LAUGHTER AND BOON AROUND CYNTHIA'S DIED AWAY. ROLAND HAD COME BACK AND HE'S BROUGHT HIS WIFE. CYNTHIA HAD TWO CHILDREN NOW...



YOU DON'T KNOW HOW HAPPY YOU'VE MADE AN OLD LONELY WOMAN, ENIG... ROLAND?

WE BOTH LOVE YOU, AUNT CYNTHIA.

YES, AUNT CYNTHIA.

BUT THEN CYNTHIA TELLS ME WHAT ROLAND AND ENIG HAD PLANNED.



ONCE WE GET HER TO MAKE OUT A WILL LEAVING ALL OF HER DOUGH TO US.

WE KNOCK HER OFF!

AND NOW I KNOW WHY THE BODY I EMBRACE WITHIN MY EARTH-WOMAN IS NOT AT PEACE. NOW I KNOW WHY IT SCRATCHES AND STINGS INSIDE. CYNTHIA MEADOWS HAD BEEN MURDERED...



HER NIECE AND NEPHEW HAD PUSHED HER DOWN A LONG FLIGHT OF CELLAR STAIRS. THEY'D TOLD THE DOCTOR...



WE HEARD HER SCREAM AND FALL! WE CAME AS FAST AS WE COULD! WHEN WE GOT HERE... SHE...

WHAT A HORRIBLE ACCIDENT! SOB...

SHE'S... SHE'S DEAD!

THE BODY WITHIN ME TURNS AND PUSHER AND SCRATCHES I TRY TO STOP IT. TRY TO MAKE MY INSIDES HARD... BUT IT IS DETERMINED. THEN, ONE NIGHT... MONTHS AFTER I HAD FIRST EMBRACED IT... THE BODY PULSED UPWARD INTO THE COOL AIR... PUSHING OUTWARD PAST MY CHEST-BONE.



DESPITE MY PLEASING, IT TOTTERS OFF...ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES...INTO THE COLD WIND...THE WIND THAT CARRIES BACK TO ME ONCE AGAIN THE LAUGHTER AND SCORN OF THE OTHERS...



AND WITHIN ME THERE IS AN EMPTINESS AND A HEARING ONCE MORE. I AM LONELY ONCE MORE.

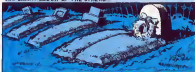
WE WERE THE SAME, CYNTHIA AND I... BARREN AND FRUITLESS AND WAITING. AND THEN THE WAITING ENDED FOR BOTH OF US. ROLAND WAS GIVEN TO HER, AND SHE TO ME. BUT LIKE ROLAND LEFT CYNTHIA TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN, SHE TOO HAS LEFT ME. NOW, I CAN ONLY DO AS SHE DID. TRY TO FORGET.



IT IS CYNTHIA. SHE HOLDS THEM IN HER VICE-LIKE GRIP AND STRADDLES ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES... THE OTHER GRAVES THAT HAVE SUDDENLY STOPPED LAUGHING. SHE HOLDS THEM... ROLAND AND ENID... HOLDS THEM OUT TO ME.



CYNTHIA IS SOME AWAY NOW. THE SCREAMING HAS STOPPED. YES, WE WERE ALIVE, SHE AND I. EACH WAITED - EACH GOT WHAT SHE WAITED FOR... ONLY TO LOSE IT AGAIN. BUT WHAT WE LOST WAS EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO US. ROLAND'S AND ENID'S TRUSTED SUFFOCATED BODIES LIE DEEP WITHIN ME, PRESSED AGAINST MY EARTH-BEDDOW. AND NOW IT IS I WHO CAN LAUGH... LAUGH AT THE OTHERS.



...FOR NOW I KNOW MY REAL FULFILLMENT. I WOULDN'T LIKE THE OTHERS AFTER ALL, THEY'RE ALL SINGLE GRAVES, I AM A DOUBLE ONE!

THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE GNARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONES I LIE SILENT WITH THE EMPTYNESS WITHIN ME. AND I WAIT. AND THEN, ONE NIGHT, FAR AWAY... I HEAR IT. THE SCREAMING...



SOMETHING IS COMING TOWARD ME, DRAGGING THE SCREAMING BEHIND IT.

...AND I REACH FOR THEM. CYNTHIA HELPS ME REACH. SHE SHOVES ASIDE MY SKIN-CRUST, SODGOPS OUT MY INSIDES, PUSHES THEM, SHRIeking, INTO MY EMBRACE...



PER, HEH. AND SO, KIDDIES... OUR LITTLE BELGIAN-BODDENDOS ON TWO GRAVE NOTE. ROLAND AND ENID WERE PUNISHED FOR THEIR GRIMING... BURIED ALIVE. BY CYNTHIA'S CORPSE, AND OUR LITTLE GRAVE BOTTED THEM HAPPILY EVER AFTER. SO NOW... HONK WHERE'S CYNTHIA THESE DAYS, TO ASK? WHY SHE JUST WANDERED AROUND TILL SHE FOUND SOME OTHER



THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S GRIM FAIRY TALE!

BECAUSE I HAVE RECEIVED SUCH A **FLOOD OF REQUESTS** (ONE THE EDITOR'S MOTHER-IN-LAW!) I HAVE DECIDED TO TELL YOU **ANOTHER INFANTILE INSANITY**. AFTER CAREFUL AND INTEREST RESEARCH, I HAVE DISCOVERED THE TRUE FACTS BEHIND THE GRIM FAIRY TALE ABOUT THE PRINCESS WHO SLEPT ALL THOSE YEARS. YOU KNOW... THE ONE CALLED...

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY!



ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO, IN A KINGDOM FAR AWAY... EVEN FURTHER THAN BROOKLYN, MAYBE... THERE STOOD A CASTLE, COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY A HIGH IMPENET... IMPENETRA... IMPENETRA... IT WAS A **THICK GROWTH OF BRAMBLES**, ALL THORNY AND WHAT-NOT, AND TO THIS CASTLE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THE IMPENET... IMPENET... THE **STUPID**, CAME A PRINCE...

PARSON, HE, MY GOOD MAN.
WHAT PLACE IS THIS?

HUH?



I SAID, WHAT PLACE IS **THAT**? WHO REMIRED IN YON PALACE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THAT IMPENET... IMPENET... THAT **BRAMBLE FOREST**?

SO WHO WANTS TO KNOW?





ISN'T IT *TRUE*, MY GOOD MAN, THAT MANY YEARS AGO, A KING AND QUEEN LIVED IN THAT CASTLE?



AND THE KING AND QUEEN WANTED A CHILD VERY *BADLY*.



AND FINALLY, THE QUEEN PRESENTED THE KING WITH A BOUNCING BABY GIRL.



THE KING WAS SO OVERJOYED WITH HIS NEW PRINCESS, THAT HE ISSUED AN INVITATION...

HERE IS A LIST OF *EVERYBODY* WHO IS ANYBODY. INVITE THEM TO A FEAST... IN HONOR OF MY NEW DAUGHTER.



THE VILDS OF THE KINGDOM FLOCKED TO THE FEAST... FEARED TO THE FLOST...ER. THEY CAME TO EAT...

SOME *SPREAD!* IT MUST BE JELLY, 'CAUSE JAM DON'T SHAKE LIKE THAT.



BUT THE KING, WHO WAS A FORTNETA, KING, HAD FORGOTTEN TO INVITE ONE BIG WHEEL.

AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... YOU WILL ALL MAKE A *PREDICTION* CONCERNING THE HAPPY FUTURE OF MY NEW DAUGHTER!



THIS BIG WHEEL WAS FIT TO BE TIED, REMEMBER... BUT ITS TIGHT TIGHT WHEEL? TIRE ON THE WHEEL? OH, NEVER MIND! ANYWAY, THIS BIG WHEEL ROLLED IN AT THE HEIGHT OF THE FESTIVITIES...

YOU WANT A *PREDICTION*, KING BRINGS? ALL RIGHT? I'LL GIVE YOU ONE... THE PRINCESS WILL DIE ON HER EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY...



EVERYONE AT THE FEAST WAS SHOCKED AT THE PREDICTION OF THE BIG-SHOT WHO WASN'T INVITED.

DID THE *GLORV-DORV?* ALWAYS *G'MON!* RATE SCREAM! SCREAM!



BUT A THOUGHTFUL V.I.P. CALMED THE AGITATED GATHERING BY PUTTING IN HER TWO CENTS...

ON HER EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, THE PRINCESS WILL NOT DIE, BUT WILL GO TO SLEEP.

AND *G'MON* ETHEL, THE PARTY IS NOT IN REAL DULL!





THE PRINCE STOOD UP, SQUARE AND STRONG.

THAT'S BECAUSE NONE OF THEM HAS A SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE!



THE PRINCE TURNED TO THE BRAMBLES.

IT IS LATE! SOON IT WILL BE DARK! I MUST HURRY! 'BYE!'

'BYE! HAPPY REWIND!'



THE BRAVE PRINCE STRUCK OFF INTO THE THICK GROWTH OF THORNY BRAMBLES.

SEE HOW THE LETHALLY ARMED BRANCHES FALL BEFORE THE KEEN BLADE OF MY TRUSTY SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE.



HOUR AFTER HOUR, HE HACKED.

WELL, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT? IT'S A HACK STORY!



... TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE PASSED SPEED-UP, SKEWELED, MUMMIFIED BODIES OF PRINCE CHARMING WHO HAD WAIRLY ATTEMPTED TO REACH THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

CHORE...



... THE SUN WAS JUST BEGINNING TO SET WHEN CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING REACHED THE CASTLE DOOR.

ONE MORE HACK AND I'LL BE THROUGH.



EDITOR'S NOTE! ONE MORE HACK KARN LIKE THIS AND WE'LL ALL BE THROUGH.

FINALLY, THE PRINCE BRUNG OPEN THE CASTLE DOOR.

SLEEPING BEAUTY? I AM HERE!



BREATHLESSLY, HE RUSHED FROM ROOM TO ROOM.

SLEEPING BEAUTY? WHERE ARE YOU?



AND THEN...

OH! THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... SLEEPING!





THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HELLO, HELLO AND NOW IT'S WIND-UP TIME IN C.R.'S MIDWINTER, AND YOUR HOSTESS IN THE HAUNT OF FEAR, YOUR STENDER OF SCARY STORIES, YOUR DISHER-OUTER OF DELICIOUS DREAMS, THE OLD WITCH, IS READY WITH HER RECKING CAULDRON. SO TUCK YOUR DROOL DIPS UNDER YOUR QUIVERING CHINS AND I'LL BEGIN THE FOUL FARE. I CALL...

SHADOW OF DEATH

COME WITH ME TO A LONELY CORNER IN THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS SECTION OF A LARGE CITY. OVERHEAD, THE LAST FADING STAR IS FINALLY RETREATING BEFORE THE ADVANCING LIGHT OF DAWN, AND THE SLEEPING CITY IS AWAKENING TO THE SOUNDS OF JANGLING ALARM CLOCKS. BUT LONG BEFORE THE CITY'S OFFICE WORKERS AND BUSY HOUSEWIVES HAVE RISEN FROM THEIR WARM BEDS, EZRA WORTON HAS BEEN ON THE JOB. THERE, HE IS NOW, UNLOCKING HIS LITTLE NEWSSTAND AND SWINGING WIDE ITS DOORS. NOTICE HOW EZRA LABORS, WINCING IN PAIN. YES, DEAR READER, EZRA IS AN INVALID. A CRIPPLED NEWSDEALER. EZRA WORTON IS PARALYZED FROM THE WAIST DOWN.



NOTICE THE BUNDLES OF MORNING NEWSPAPERS STACKED ON THE CURB BESIDE EZRA'S NEWSSTAND, READY TO BE UNTIED AND LAID OUT NEATLY ON DISPLAY. SEE HOW EZRA STRUGGLES, BENDING IN HIS WHEELCHAIR AND LIFTING THE HEAVY PACKAGES...



NOW SEE THE DARK AND DESERTED SUBWAY KIOSK NEARBY, INTO WHICH, IN A FEW MINUTES, THE OFFICE-BOUNDED SECRETARIES AND THE FACTORY-BOUNDED LABORERS WILL BEGIN TO POUR, ARMED WITH THE NEWSPAPERS THEY HAVE PURCHASED FROM EZRA'S STAND.



YES, DEAR READER: EZRA SMILES. HE SMILES BECAUSE HE IS CONTENT. FOR THIS IS HIS *LIFE*. ALL THAT MATTERS TO HIM: THIS LITTLE NEWSSTAND, WITH ITS FEW HUNDRED DAILY PAPER SALES, IS EZRA'S CASTLE. ITS WEAKER PROFIT IS THE LINE DRAWN BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE AND STARVATION FOR HIM. SO EZRA SMILES. BUT EZRA DOES NOT SMILE FOREVER. SUDDENLY EZRA CATCHES SIGHT OF A FIGURE STANDING NEAR THE SUBWAY KIOSK...



AND NOW THE PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO HURRY FROM ALL DIRECTIONS TOWARD THE SUBWAY ENTRANCE. AND THE BIG MAN WITH THE PAPERS UNDER HIS ARMS HURRIES TO MEET THEM ON STROMS LESS THAT ARE NOT WITHERED AND PARALYZED AS EZRA'S ARE...



NOW, EZRA IS READY FOR THEM... FOR THE PARADE OF HUMANITY TO PASS BY HIS STAND AND TOSS ITS COPPER PENNIES UPON HIS PAPERWEIGHTS AND EAT AWAY AT THE STACKS UNTIL ONLY A FEW LAST BITTERED COPIES REMAIN. SEE HOW HE SMILES.



...A MAN CLUTCHING A STACK OF NEWSPAPERS UNDER HIS HUGE ARM.



YES, EZRA DOES NOT SMILE. FEAR GRIPS EZRA'S HELPLESS BODY. THAT MAN... THAT MAN WITH THE PAPERS AND THE HEALTHY LEGS IS STEALING PAPER SALES THAT ORDINARILY WOULD BE EZRA'S.



EZRA BEGINS TO DO WHAT HE HAS NEVER DONE BEFORE. HE CALLS OUT, TRYING TO ATTRACT ATTENTION, CALLING FOR SALES, IMPLORING, REMINDING THE MASS OF HUMANITY WITH HEALTHY LEGS THAT IT HAS ALWAYS BOUGHT ITS PAPERS FROM HIM...



AND NOW, THE MORNING RUSH HOUR IS ALMOST OVER. EZRA'S PAPER STACKS STAND HIGH AND HARDLY TOUCHED. THE MAN WITH THE HEALTHY LEGS WAVES TO EZRA.



THE MAN MOVES OFF. EZRA STARES AT THE UNSOLD PAPERS PILED UPON HIS NEWSSTAND COUNTER.



ALL DAY LONG, EZRA SITS IN HIS WHEELCHAIR TRYING TO SELL HIS PAPERS TO THE FEW WHO STRAGGLE BY HIS STAND.



FINALLY, DARKNESS BEGINS TO FALL. SADLY, EZRA TIES HIS UNSOLD PAPERS INTO BUNDLES AND DEPOSITS THEM ON THE CURB FOR THE TRUCKS TO PICK UP WHEN THEY DELIVER THE NEXT DAY'S EDITIONS.



BUT THE SLEEPY-EYED PEOPLE ARE BLIND. IN THEIR RUSH TO CATCH THEIR TRAINS, THEY DO NOT NOTICE THAT THEY ARE BUYING THEIR MORNING PAPERS FROM SOMEONE NEW.



THE NEXT MORNING THE MAN IS THERE AGAIN, HURRYING ABOUT ON HIS STRONG LEGS SELLING HIS PAPERS TO THE UNWARY PASSAGE, WHILE EZRA CRIES IN SILENCE.



THE DAYS PASS. EVERY MORNING THE MAN IS THERE, STEALING SALES FROM EZRA. AND EVERY NIGHT, EZRA COUNTS HIS UNSOLD PAPERS AND TIES THEM INTO BUNDLES.



I'LL... I'LL NEVER MAKE ENOUGH TO LIVE ON THIS WAY!

BUT WHAT CAN EZRA DO? WHAT CAN A CRIPPLE DO TO A MAN WITH A HEALING STRONG BODY? THE TRUCKMAN LEAVES. EZRA SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...



IF I WEREN'T PARALYZED... IF I WEREN'T CRIPPLED AND HELPLESS... IF I WERE STRONG, I'D SHOW HIM! I'D... SON...

ABOVE, THE SKY IS JUST BEGINNING TO GLOW LIGHT. THE GLOW FROM A NEARBY STREETLAMP CASTS EZRA'S SHADOW UP AGAINST HIS NEWSSTAND.



I'D... SON... I'D...

A WEEK GOES BY. TWO, ONE HOPING, A TRUCKMAN WHO DELIVERS EZRA'S PAPERS WARNS HIM.



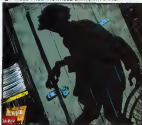
IF YOU CAN'T SELL MORE PAPERS THAN THIS, EZRA, WE'LL CUT YOU OUT OF OUR DELIVERY ROUTE.

I'LL... I'LL TRY. I'LL DO SOMETHING!

SUDDENLY, EZRA'S SHADOW LIFTS ITS HEAD FROM ITS HANDS...



IT RISES FROM ITS WHEEL CHAIR, WAVERING...



IT SLIDES OFF, DOWN THE DESERTED STREET, ON UNSTEADY LEGS...



...IT SLIDES ACROSS BRICK WALLS...



...BOARD FENCES...



...HESITATES BEFORE A HARDWARE STORE...



IT REACHES IN, PLUCKING THE SHADOW OF THE AXE
PARKING IN THE WAGON...



...LIFTING AWAY THE SHADOW OF THE SHOVEL, STANDING
BEHIND THE GARDEN TOOLS...



...BACK ACROSS BOARD FENCES...



...BACK ACROSS BRICK WALLS...



...TO A FAMILIAR CORNER WHERE A
FAMILIAR SHADOW STANDS WITH THE
SHADOW OF A HUGE BUNDLE OF
PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS...



EDRA'S SHADOW LIFTS THE SHADOW OF THE AXE IT HAS STOLEN...



THE SHADOWS OF THE PAPERS SCATTER ACROSS THE BUILDING WALL AS THE FIGURE CRUMPLES, SPURTING A SHADOW-FOUNTAIN FROM ITS WOUND.



NOW EDRA'S SHADOW DRAGS THE LIFELESS SHADOW DOWN THE ALLEY BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS...



...AND BRINGS IT DOWN UPON THE FAMILIAR SHADOW WITH THE PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS.



EDRA'S SHADOW PEERS AT IT. THE CRUMPLED SHADOW STIRS. EDRA'S SHADOW LIFTS THE AXE SHADOW ONCE MORE.



...DEPOSITING IT IN AN EMPTY LOT BESIDE A FADING BILLBOARD...



WITH THE SHADOW-SHOVEL, EDRA'S SHADOW Digs A SHALLOW SHADOW-GRAVE BESIDE THE BILLBOARD.



...AND PUSHES THE LIFELESS SHADON IN...



...AND SHOVELS THE SHADOW-SOIL IN UPON IT.

THEN, EDRA'S SHADOW RETURNS TO THE NEWSSTAND WHERE EDRA STILL SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...



...AND EDRA'S SHADOW ASSUMES EDRA'S POSITION AS EDRA HEARS...



EDRA ROLLS HIS WHEELCHAIR TO THE CRUMPLED FORM OF THE BIG MAN WITH THE HEALTHY LEGS LYING AMONG HIS SCATTERED PAPERS...



LATER, THE MORGUE-WAGON ATTENDANTS LIFT THE BODY OF THE MAN WHO ALMOST STOLE EDRA'S BUSINESS FROM HIM. AS THEY CARRY IT TO THE WAITING TRUCK, EDRA GASPS...



WHICH IS THE NEAREST TRICK OF THE WHEEL, WOULDN'T YOU SAY? WELL, THAT'S MY REVOLVING RECIPE FOR THIS ISSUE, DROOPS. NOW IT'S TIME TO PUT OUT THE FIRE UNDER MY POT AND CLOSE THE DOORS TO THE HANDS OF FEAR, SO TODDLE ALONG. WE SHOULD REMEMBER WILL ALL BE BACK NEXT IN V.R.'S MASH, THE VAULT OF NEWTON. 'BYE, NOW, ER... I SAID 'BYE' SO GO ON 'N SCRAM, ALREADY!



...FOR, ALTHOUGH THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING BRIGHTLY, THE DEAD MAN'S BODY CASTS NO SHADOW.



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